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ABSTRACT

The Caravan House program, the group home for adolescents sponsored by the Palo Alto Adolescent Services Corporation, is described. Included are suggestions for developing a resource file of appropriate recreational and vocational resources. The materials reviewed cover the following areas: (1) group home residents' needs for employment and recreation; (2) community resources such as employment opportunities, volunteer programs, and community individuals; (3) internal resources such as group workshops, house outings, and weekend excursions; and (4) listings of community services and agencies. Although the document is geographically specific, the materials presented, particularly the resources contained in the appendix, are applicable to other settings. (Author/HLM)

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EMPLOYMENT AND RECREATION

A Practical Approach to Resources for Teenagers in Group Homes

Prepared by

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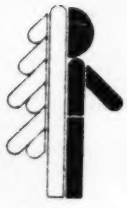

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for

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September 1978

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Palo Alto Adolescent Services Corporation initiates programs and promotes interagency cooperation among youth service providers in the Palo Alto area. The goal of the agency is to help young people take responsibility for their lives and their choices.

Caravan House, the agency's group home for young people aged 13 - 17 years, was opened in November 1977. A community-based alternative to incarceration, Caravan House offers out-of-home placement to both wards of the court (300's) and status offenders (601's).

The Project

Suspecting a great need for all kinds of alternative housing and services for adolescents in the Palo Alto area, and aware of no existing comprehensive needs assessment, PAASC began an Adolescent Services Planning Project in April 1978. The first portion of the project emphasized housing. The second part expanded the project to include employment and recreation components, particularly in relation to adolescents not living at home.

This Adolescent Services Planning team was hired to spend time as counselors with the residents of Caravan House to determine their recreational and employment needs. In addition, resources were to be assessed and, where necessary, developed to meet the needs of the individual residents. A resource file was to be assembled and made available to other group homes.

ORIENTATION

Perspective

In order to describe the needs detected and resources discovered it is necessary to illustrate the roles we played in the first summer at Caravan House. Our scheduled time at the group home was utilized as Counselors. The remainder of our time was spent as Planners. The nature of our dual roles afforded us an unusual perspective. We were both intimately involved in the daily needs of the residents and necessarily detached in our efforts as Planners to discover summer activities.

The immediate aim was to locate and initiate appropriate summer involvements for each of the residents at Caravan House. The secondary aim was to gather, as a by-product of the primary effort, a resource file. The purpose of the file was to maintain an up-to-date body of information regarding recreational and vocational resources as they relate to the needs of group homes. It was intended that eventually our findings would be made available to other group homes in the area.

Our approach was developed in light of our dual roles. Our efforts to meet the immediate needs of Caravan House residents would naturally steer us toward the most pertinent resources.

Time, too, had its say in deciding our strategy. We felt a genuine sense of urgency about providing the residents with constructive summer activities.

We utilized an informal, individualized interview to learn the interests, aptitudes, and needs of each resident. They were easily engaged in discussing their interests. We attempted to match their divulged interests with the therapeutic goals of their treatment plans. We sought specific jobs, volunteer, positions, activities, workshops, and classes for each individual, and retained our findings for the file.

There is much to be said about combining the roles and responsibilities of Counselors and Planners. The issue of personal involvement in the lives of the residents recurred. The daily needs of the residents required an enormous amount of energy and attention. It was necessary for us as Planners to detach at a point in order to fulfill the more distant goals of assessing resources and developing a file.

This was the first summer for the program. In its youth, the program itself was like a needy adolescent, demanding investments of time and attention to assure its growth. It became difficult to decide where to give and where to withhold attention. Despite the drawbacks of the combined roles, a unique vantage point was established. We were close enough to readily detect the needs of the residents in terms of recreation and employment. At times the combination of roles slowed the process of Planning. However, our assessments and observations were more educated than they would have been had our contact been any less intense.

The Needs of Group Home Residents

Primary Needs

Before discussing the needs of the residents for recreational and vocational involvements it is important to at least cite their more primary needs. For these children environment in itself is therapeutic. Delivered lovingly, structure, stability, and consistency are what mend the wounds of their previous experience. Providing food, clothing, shelter, and the opportunity to form nourishing personal attachments are the most important functions of the group home.

Employment

There is a considerable amount of anxiety in the group home about "coming of age" and "making it on your own". Adolescents who are not living at home have a special need for a source of income. They also need the discipline and training that employment provides. At the very least they need to be exposed to a variety of wage earning skills and vocational options. Vocational planning is a realistic and pressing concern for group home residents. These are the children of broken homes; often battered, abused, or neglected. Most are well aware

that at age eighteen they will be out on their own. There are, typically, no parents waiting in the wings willing or able to rescue a foundering young adult.

Recreation

There is an unmistakable need among group home residents for structured activities in which they can experience having fun with other people. Having been entrenched in assorted family crises, shuttled from one placement to another, without any consistent familial support, there is therapeutic value in being allowed a chance to play. The enjoyable parts of being a child are rapidly overwhelmed by the demands of a haphazard upbringing. Denied the better half of childhood, these teenagers have had to grow up fast in many respects in order to survive.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Employment Programs

In response to the needs of youth for employment and training, an array of federally funded projects have been implemented. Counselors representing the various programs are available to students through the counseling departments at all of the local high schools.

The Summer Program for Economically Disadvantaged Youth (S.P.E.D.Y.) provides economically disadvantaged teenagers with job training and work experience.

Youth Employment Service (Y.E.S.) is C.E.T.A.'s counterpart for youth, supplying non-profit organizations with year-round positions for teens.

The Youth Employment and Training Program (Y.E.T.P.) operates within the county school system providing on-the-job vocational training in conjunction with academic courses.

Vocational Opportunities in Career Education (V.O.I.C.E.) initiates an emancipation process for the high school senior with an opportunity to gain experience in the world of work.

The residents of Caravan House were informed of the availability of the programs and urged to make contact with the appropriate counselors. As a result two residents were able to secure summer employment that related to their particular interests. One worked as an activities leader for the Palo Alto Recreation Department while another aided teachers at a community child care center.

Volunteer Involvements

Given the fact that people between the ages of fourteen and sixteen have a hard time finding jobs, we developed an alternative to paid employment with volunteer involvements. The Volunteer Bureau is an organization that matches skilled volunteers with non-profit agencies in need of assistance. Our residents were interviewed individually by the coordinator of positions for youth. They were questioned about their interests, inclinations, and expectations. They were referred, as if by an Employment Agency, to potential "employers". Once

referred, they were responsible for interviewing with the selected agencies. The entire process was handled seriously and with high regard for the personal aptitudes and needs of the "applicant". Once "hired", the residents were required, again as if employed, to adhere to the work schedules as agreed upon with their supervisors.

The success of the program was due, largely, to the attitude maintained within the group home. Volunteer involvements, when discussed, were referred to as "work". They were valued as opportunities to obtain experience with which to later qualify for paid positions. Additionally, they allowed the residents to sample vocational directions and gather material with which to make more mature future choices.

Among the agencies our residents assisted in this manner were The City of Palo Alto Animal Shelter, The Children's Theater, and The Stanford Child Care Center.

Palo Alto Recreation Department and Y.M.C.A.

The Palo Alto Recreation Department and the Y.M.C.A. offer classes at minimal or no cost in arts, crafts, music, dance, and sports. We made contact with course instructors and encouraged the residents to pursue courses that corresponded with their interests.

Individuals in the Community

We continually attempted to involve individuals in the community in the lives of Caravan House residents. A local coffee house owner was pleased to engage one resident in assisting him on a regular basis. A computer programmer shared his collection of electronic games to the residents' delight. An Educational Counselor gave unsparingly of her time and talents. She tutored individuals in reading, offered dinners at her home, and was willing to sit in for many a weary counselor.

INTERNAL RESOURCES

Groups and Workshops

In an effort to both draw upon our own inherent resources as a staff and promote group cohesiveness among the residents, we developed a series of afternoon groups and workshops. Each was led by a team of two staff members. The Feelings Group provided a structured space in which the residents were encouraged to express their feelings about themselves and one another. With the assistance of the group leaders many an in-house tension was exposed and resolved. The goals of the Feelings Group were to both address the immediate concerns of the residents and strengthen their communication skills. The Role Playing Group employed improvisation, theater games, and psycho-drama techniques as creative outlets and therapeutic tools. The Discovery Group was created to acquaint the residents with nearby cultural and educational resources. Each outing was coupled with a test of sorts to insure the group's attentiveness. They discovered museums, libraries, exhibits, a bird sanctuary, and toured the

local high school campuses, and the Palo Alto Police Department. In the Foods Workshop the residents, so eager to be "out on their own", were introduced to the responsibilities of menu planning, budgeting, shopping, cooking, and the importance of nutrition. Finally, The Issues Group focussed on topics relevant to the concerns of teenagers with presentations, exercises, and discussions about Values Clarification, Career Choices, Sexuality, Discrimination, and Drug Education.

House Outings

To accompany the residents' regularly structured summer involvements we experimented with a myriad of house outings. Our intention was to provide more carefree experiences than the more serious commitments allowed. Picnic dinners in Foothill Park broke the monotony of always eating at home, and occasional evenings at the movies were always welcome. Residents looked forward to their Wednesdays at the swimming pool and Friday mornings at the track. Over the course of the summer we managed to familiarize ourselves as a household with most of the city parks and community centers. Use was made of the neighborhood libraries and many educational resources at Stanford. There seemed an endless supply of inexpensive resources available nearby in our community. Regular house outings made a world of difference at Caravan House.

Individual Projects

Residents were urged to involve themselves in around-the-house projects. What free time they had was used constructively. Several donated bicycles, repaired by mechanically inclined residents, became a reliable source of transportation. Bedrooms gradually became displays of each resident's interests and style. Works of art dressed the walls, personalizing the decoration of the house. Several residents even designed and made their own clothes.

Weekend Excursions

Committed to the concept of learning about oneself through shared adventure, we led the residents in a weekend excursion. Two days were spent exploring the Lake Tahoe area through a variety of group activities. During the day we hiked, climbed a mountain, swam, paddled boats, fixed food over a fire, and generally enjoyed one another. At a small private college complete with music, gymnastics mats, and a trampoline, everyone had a festive evening.

This simple break from the household routine was a challenging and rejuvenating experience. Upon our return, the residents demonstrated a greater sense of unity and a refreshing willingness to face problems together.

THE RESOURCE FILE

In our search for community resources we discovered that existing programs were in their usual state of flux, compounded by the effects of Proposition 13. The resources with which we were concerned are, by nature, fleeting. What we could gather by the end of this summer would, predictably, be meaningless by the start of the next. With funding so precarious, programs appear and then vanish within no time. A representative of V.O.I.C.E., for instance, told us

that, due to Proposition 13, there simply are no more funds for their program. This, it seemed, would be their last summer. An employee of S.P.E.D.Y was unable to predict whether or not their project would weather another season.

We also realized that the most effective use of our time was in providing individualized counselling and placement for each resident. Conducting a general resource search was secondary to engaging the individual residents in enriching activities.

Throughout the summer we were sharing resources and program ideas with some of our neighboring group homes. These contacts made us aware of the value of pooling resources and exchanging ideas. Rather than compile a static and easily outdated file we began to consider a more practical approach: a network of neighboring group homes. Already our participation in a weekly recreation class at Casa S.A.Y. had provided the residents of Caravan House with a sense of pride in their house and a chance to meet other teenagers. The staffs at Casa S.A.Y and Sunporch all agreed with ours that regular meetings focussed on our mutual needs would be enormously beneficial.

The resources used in this project are listed in the appendix.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our hope is that efforts will continue to develop recreational and vocational programs for the residents of group homes. To aid those who will continue the work we have begun we will share some of what we have learned from our involvement at Caravan House. A very obvious issue for us has been the advantages and disadvantages of a dual role. The intimate connection with the residents sensitized us to their needs and made it incredibly difficult to pursue any of our broader goals. We recommend that future planners be less attached to the house itself in order to do justice to the tasks of program development.

There is a need for both recreational and vocational specialists to develop ongoing therapeutic programs. The daily needs of residents and house prohibit staff counselors from providing these vital elements.

The responsibility for initiating and maintaining a productive network of group homes should be delegated. This task should be handled by a person with the time and perspective to coordinate both joint group home activities and inter-staff meetings. We have certainly laid the groundwork for this particular project. Group home directors and staffs agree upon the need for such a network.

We sincerely hope that the seed planted in Caravan House by this project will continue to grow, and that our efforts have enriched the lives of a household of struggling, delightful teenagers.

APPENDIX

Resources Used in This Project

American National Red Cross (a resource for workshops and demonstrations on safety and health)
400 Mitchell Lane
Palo Alto, CA
Mrs. Linda Williams
322-2143

American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO)
P.O. Box 387
Palo Alto, CA 94301
John Emanuelson
324-0863

Boy Scouts of America
1305 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA
Robert Horten
327-5900

Camp Unalayee
1176 Emerson
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Janet Erskine
328-1513

Community Association for the Retarded, Inc. (CAR)
3864 Middlefield Road (good with young volunteers)
Palo Alto, CA 94303
Ralph Scheer
494-0550

Environmental Volunteers
1176 Emerson Street
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Doris Ash
327-6017

Foothill College (recreation facilities)
12345 El Monte Road
Los Altos Hills, CA
948-8590

Health Education Center (resource for workshops and classes)
400 Channing Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Ann Hammond
326-9600

Hidden Villa Environmental Project
Drawer A-H
Los Altos, CA 94022
Erik Jorgensen
948-4690

Little League of Palo Alto
3672 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District (recreation facilities, parks, community centers)
375 Distel Circle
Suite D-1
Los Altos, CA
Ann Crosley
965-4717

Palo Alto, City of:

Baylands Interpretive Center
2775 Embarcadero Road
Palo Alto, CA
329-2506

Children's Theater
1305 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Michael Litfin
329-2410

Foothill Park
3300 Page Mill Road
Los Altos Hills, CA
329-2423

Junior Museum
1451 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA 94301
329-2111

Libraries
1213 Newell Road
Palo Alto, CA
Mary Jo Levy
329-2436

Recreation Department
1305 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Scott Catlett
329-2262

Palo Alto Unified School District
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto, CA
Pat Einfalt, Information Services
855-8030

Planned Parenthood (information programs)
351 Moffet Boulevard
Mountain View, CA
961-6839

Sierra Club (recreation programs)
1176 Emerson
Palo Alto, CA
Joe Carleton
327-8111

Stanford University
Stanford, California
Stanford Museum
Tressider bowling alley
Sunday evening movies

Summer Program for Economically Disadvantaged Youth (SPEDY)
100 Skyport Drive
San Jose, CA 95110
299-2912

Vocational Opportunities in Career Education (VOICE)
100 Skyport Drive
San Jose, CA 95110
299-2912

Volunteer Bureau
460 California Avenue, Room 13
Palo Alto, CA 94306
Florence Lewis
326-9381

Youth Employment and Training Program
100 Skyport Drive
San Jose, CA 95110
299-3863

Youth Employment Service
457 Kingsley Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301
329-1686

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
3412 Ross Road
Palo Alto, CA 94303
Steve Totten
494-1883